## Iowa State Board of Education Position Statement on No Child Left Behind April 10, 2003

The Iowa State Board of Education supports the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) intent of ensuring high student achievement. This intent is consistent with the State Board's system goal "To improve the level of learning, achievement and performance of all students so they will become successful members of their community and workforce."

Iowa schools, teachers and students have achieved "excellence in education" in a range of categories because they have high standards and expectations for continuous improvement. According to officials at Iowa Testing Programs, nine out of ten Iowa students score above the national median on achievement tests. Specific examples from the National Education Association include:

- Iowa ranks 6th in the nation in the proportion of 4th graders with high scores in reading.
- Iowa ranks 8th in the proportion of 4th graders scoring at the highest two levels in math, and this has increased by 27% between 1996 and 2000.
- The proportion of schools offering AP courses has increased by 51% since 1996, and our AP students are among the highest scoring on AP exams with the 6<sup>th</sup> highest scores in the nation.
- Iowa is one of the top 6 states in the nation in the percentage of high school students taking upper level science courses.
- Iowa students are among the best prepared for college based on college entrance exams. Our students have for the past decade scored in the top five nationally on both the SAT and ACT tests.
- Iowa is one of the nine best states in proportion of high school graduates who go immediately on to college.
- Iowa leads the nation in the size and scope of its gifted and talented program. It is the #1 state in the nation in the percentage of public primary schools with a gifted and talented program and one of the top three states in the nation in the percentage of public secondary schools with a gifted and talented program.

These exceptional achievements are supported by strong local ownership of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. At the same time, our state legislature and education officials have worked together to build an accountability process unmatched by any other state in the nation. Districts are held accountable for student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science through the establishment of achievement levels tied to a comparable measure across all districts. The current accountability achievement levels have been in place since 1998, at which point they were approved by federal authorities for compliance with 1994 ESEA requirements. Accountability for local school districts requires them to establish content standards; establish local assessment systems using multiple measures, including Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED); and to set annual improvement goals in reading, mathematics, and science. Our extensive research and experience in the area of school improvement shows unequivocally that local assessments provide the best and most relevant, on-going data to assist teachers, buildings, and districts in determining appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies – and improving instruction is the most effective way to improve student learning. Manipulating Iowa's multiple, local assessments to provide statewide, high-stakes accountability data would be a corruption of the purpose, outcomes, and value of the assessments.

Each district must report progress annually to their communities and the state, and the report indicators include all of the required components of student achievement reporting in NCLB. The State Department of Education monitors progress report compliance and verifies whether each district is meeting its goals.

The State Department and this State Board also reports statewide results annually in both a written Condition of Education Report and a presentation to the public – these results also are based on the achievement levels associated with the reading and mathematics standards assessed by the ITBS/ITED.

Because of consistently high student achievement levels, we are confident that Iowa's system of strong local ownership, in concert with state and federal accountability, is the ideal manner in which to implement the accountability principles inherent in the NCLB mandates. The Iowa Department of Education submitted evidence of this integration and alignment of the NCLB accountability principles with the current state accountability system in its NCLB accountability workbook in January. We strongly support that proposal and encourage timely approval by the United States Department of Education. We believe that the USDE has the authority (and in fact has made the promise) to grant flexibility to states with proven excellence in education and demonstrated student results. Lack of approval will seriously undermine Iowa's current system of demonstrated excellence, set back years of steady improvement in curriculum, instruction and the creation of rich and deep local assessment systems, and create devastating cost increases at a time when Iowa schools already are struggling to manage current budget shortages.